

Interview with Mrs. Laura Smalley, Hempstead, Texas, 1941

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Mrs. Laura Smalley: Only Indians I ever seen was over, was here. And they wasn't wild. I used hear moma talk about them. When said she was, she was a child, she said that to one morning she went out and old mister, she was big enough, you know, to handle water, and say when she got to the don't, open the don't it the stars was falling. Now when the stars was falling that morning and said she didn't know, and said old mistress looked out, and say's ah, "Don't you go out there." She say's ah, "Star." She said, she just went like meat frying, you know. Said, the whole earth was just, just ah lit up, you know. Said they just going like meat frying. *[she makes a swish sound to imitate falling stars]* S-shhhh-s-hhhh-s-hhh-shhuh.

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Just before day, and said that to, when she went to go to the well ah, to the spring, and the stars fell, tell me they didn't quit fall until ah, daylight. And said she met some Indian, Indian, Indians, down there, you know, where they pack water from a spring, she said. And said she met some wild Indian. And they had, old Mrs. Cooke, had give her a piece of bread. And gave, give her the, they give them the beads, you know. Give them, give her some, give her some beads, some beads, you know, and took the bread. And every time—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Aaah ??? .

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yeah, sir. Took the bread from her. And said every time she go a step in front, she, or go walk, they step in front of her. Every time they, she go to walk, they step in front of her.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And said that finally at last they ate the bread up and lift they hand back, you know, the, took the, took the beads away from her. And, and that said they was wild, took it away from her. And said—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: —she went back to the house crying. Went back to the house crying. Said her, she told she had met some people and took her bread and give her give her some bead and then took the beads away from her. And that's only ever I hear talk of wild Indian, I-Indians in my life.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I never hear talk of no Indian. Ain't never seen none, until ah, u-until I don't know where them was Indians what, had all them feathers in the hat.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm. That's right.

John Henry Faulk: That's right. That's Indians.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I-i-in the heads.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I've seen some of them.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Those are Indians.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And when, when I was a child, I don't know where them was an Indian or not then. You see, that I was a child they'd go in, in droves.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: That's in droves. And ah, come in your house, you know, and take what they wanted. Something to eat like that. You never take nothing but something to eat—like that. And then get out, you know, and make fun of me and grin, you know, and laugh, you know. [*dog barks*]

John Henry Faulk: Naw, is that right?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, and laugh. Take it and, all folk are there they go and take it. If they offer they hand, you know, for it, and made the motion, you just as well go give it to them, or let them, because they go on in and they get that stuff. Mama had an old chicken once. [*dog bark*] Great big old chicken. And it didn't have nothing but pot then. Didn't have, didn't have no stove. Just had pots, as I recollect it. Had pots.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And taken, had that chicken in the, in that pot. And I don't know what that man said to her, said to her, ah you know. To the other in out doors. He said some kind of language, we didn't hear it. Here he come in with a bucket. And just take that pot and pour all that, that stuff in that pot. With them feathers in his head. In his ah, hat, you know.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Poured, poured all that in, extra vittels in that pot. And us little childrens standing around there hungry. And they had long, high feathers in they head. And they had, and them babies tied on they back.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm. Yeah, that's right. That's the way they do.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And tied on they, they back. Yes, I didn't know what they was.

John Henry Faulk: What did they make the bedding out of in those days, the folks, what did the Negro, ah, colored folks use for bedding?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: They'd have quilts like they have now.

John Henry Faulk: I mean, what did they make mattresses out of, what, how would they make these feather beds?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: He will get that old chicken, you know, and things like that. That's what they get them off, now geese, you know, they, some of them are, wise enough to have goose feathers. But when I, when I was coming up, tell the truth about it, when I was coming up, we'd go out and cut our grass, cut it, you know, just take hold and cut it, and let take it off and pile it off and let it dry, and put that in the mattress.

John Henry Faulk: You'd sleep on that.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. We used to.

John Henry Faulk: Did you sleep pretty good?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. It slept pretty good. And wouldn't grind up neither. You know, we cut it and it stayed.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: But if you wait till it frost fell on it'll ground up fine.

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: We was children have, we, mama would have us to ah, them old big head old head mattress, *[laugh]* on the bed, and we thought we was something. *[laugh]* We would. Thought we was in something.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: What about ah, joining that ah business of ah, ah, taking, hiring some of the Negroes, the good hands, you know. Good women, good men, going off and breeding them like cattle. Do you remember anything like that?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No. I didn't know, you see, they wouldn't let children know of that, you know. But I heard it after. After that—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Ahha.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: —they'd do that. But you see, when we was comming up they wouldn't let know nothing about nothing like that, but they say that was sure so. You know, just like a big, fine, looking woman, big, fine, looking man, you know. Old boss want's, you know, children's farm, you know. They just fasten them up in a house or somewhere. You know, go on off, leave them in there. Want to breed them like they was hogs or horses, something like that, I say.

John Henry Faulk: That sounds like it.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Sure does sound like it all right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And they say that's the way they used to do—

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: —in slavery time.

John Henry Faulk: Did they whip the slaves much? Do you remember how, whether they whipped them or—

Mrs. Laura Smalley: The, the biggest whupping that ever I knowed they get named, master Albert. The biggest whupping. That ever I knowed. Mr. Bethany, they didn't whup his niggas much. They had to do something mighty, m-mighty go'—you know, bad for them to whup them. Yes, Mr.—

John Henry Faulk: Well, did the slaves ever try a slip away, they ever try to run off?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No. Not none on, not, not none on the place where we was. I never heard them say they run off over there. Run off. Other places I heared them stay in the woods, and ah, so long until they wear the clothes off them, slip up. Now I heard mama say when she was a girl, when she was girl, you know, she, she, she because she brought from Mississippi, when she was a girl, they'd ah, they'd one old woman run off. She did run off. They beat her so she run off—and every night she slip home and somebody have her something to eat. Something to eat. And she'd get that vittles and go on back in the woods. Go on back stay in the woods. And they would—you know just a, they'd tell her, the other, you know, because you see, I don't know what they name, 'See so and so? Ever see them?' Say, 'No. ' Well, you tell them if they come home we ain't going whup them. We ain't going whup them if they come home. Well, that be all the way know they'd come. Said once that a man stayed in the woods so long, until his hair long on them like a dog.

John Henry Faulk: *[laugh]*

Mrs. Laura Smalley: On them. You know, just growed up, you know, and stayed in the woods. Just stayed in the woods.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: And they couldn't get them out.

John Henry Faulk: Well, did any of them run off and get plum free, where they, did you ever hear of—

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I heard talk of them.

John Henry Faulk: —your mother talking about them?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Heard them talking about they going off, you know. Going off to places where they free. ??? what I heard her say, I didn't know that. She said just like see, be some white people, you know, with some nigga come along, you know, and he'd just get them off, you know. She take them, carry them off where he wouldn't be, tell them he wouldn't be no slave, or wouldn't be beat up, you know. And carry them off that a way.

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Still, two or three they said that white folk had carried some three or four, you know, [*a horn blows*] colored people off that way. Or pick up children. Say they used to go in a wagons, you know. Go out wagons with the covers on them. I, I would see covers since I been big enough with wagon, with covers on them. Just take them and go on. And when I was a child I see little boys. A man jumped out the old covered wagon and caught the child. And caught him. And got far as Bell [Bellville, Texas] with the child. Well, I reckon that, that was a slave, I don't know. [Reckon that (?)] was a slave, but they caught him. Caught the child. And I had a grandchild that, that they taken off.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right? Who took him off?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Ah the show people I they took him off. I don't know. They took him off. They steal him.

John Henry Faulk: What do you know?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, they took that child off and mama didn't have but that one. And they took it off.

Unidentified Woman Interviewer: Mhmm.

John Henry Faulk: Well, I declare. Took him off with them.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Took it off. But they got it. [Master thought at that time (?)].

John Henry Faulk: Well, can you remember how the, what, what happened when they set you free? Do you remember what the, can you, you remember how the old master acted when they—

Mrs. Laura Smalley: No, sir. I can't remember that, you know. Can't remember that. But I, I remember, you know, the time you give them a big dinner, you know on the nineteenth.

John Henry Faulk: Is that right?

Mrs. Laura Smalley: On, on the nineteenth, you know. That's called, they still have it, give them a big dinner—on nineteenth. Well now, we didn't know about ??? . I don't hide the other side of the folks, you know, freedom. We didn't know. They just thought, you know, were just feeding us, you know. Just had a long table. And just had ah, just a little of everything you want to eat, you know. And drink,

you know. Now, and they say that was on the nineteenth—and everything you want to eat and drink. Well, you see, I didn't know what that was for.

John Henry Faulk: Uhmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: I just, you know, children wasn't wise like children is now, you know. Anything grow up now a child six, seven years old can tell you.

John Henry Faulk: That's right.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Yes, sir. They wasn't wise, they are, that's the way they done us. Give us a big dinner, Mr. Bethany and them. Mr. Bethany got Miss Mayor, and Mr. Bethany granddaughter stay right across town. And ah, she got a daughter stay out here in the country. Out near me stay.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

Mrs. Laura Smalley: Out here in the country.

John Henry Faulk: Hmm.

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